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The Tough Job Of Allen Dulles

IN RUSSIA, where the work of the government intelligence agency is shrouded in secrecy, Allen Dulles probably would have been an unqualified success. But in an open society cloak and dagger operations are denied the very concealment that makes them effective and some of these activities are bound to bring criticism.

Such was the case with Mr. Dulles during his years as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, a post from which he is now retiring.

There were mistakes and there were incidents when the undertakings of his agency were necessary but still abhorred by members of a free society unwilling to admit that the enemy must be beaten at his own game.

Mr. Dulles had personal shortcomings too. For one thing he took too much of the load on himself and failed to parcel out part of the burden to subordinates.

But basically the gaps in Mr. Dulles' reputation as an intelligence chief resulted from the inherent contradiction of an open society conducting clandestine operations.

The U-2 incident in the spring of 1960 was one example of this. The world was horrified to learn that the United States was spying on the Soviet Union and Allen Dulles was censured as a result. But only the fool or extremely naive will admit privately that such tactics aren't necessary in a Cold War.

The Cuban invasion fiasco was much the same story. Mr. Dulles took a verbal lashing for the CIA's part in the affair, but all the moral outrage did not make Cuba any the less a problem for the United States: one which must sooner or later, one way or another, be eliminated.

In both cases Mr. Dulles accepted the role of scapegoat and offered to resign to save face for the President. But both President Eisenhower and President Kennedy refused, indicating their regard for Allen Dulles. A man of this sort would have been the first to be tossed to the wolves had not his value to the nation been considered significant and his loyalty unquestioned.

This editorial also appeared in:

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